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Aesthetics: Beyond Bourriaud

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Abstract

This paper provides an insight into contemporary viewpoints and attitudes as well as historical context regarding the concept of aesthetics in the Arts. Through discussions, interviews and personal correspondences with Western Australian art critic David Bromfield and art reviewer Judith McGrath I sought their perspective as to how the terms 'relational embodiment', 'relational aesthetics' and 'networked interconnectivity' further inform art practice in a contemporary data rich and internet enabled context. Speculation as to how these insights inform my creative professional practice and future direction in postgraduate research serves as a conclusion for this paper.

Introduction

In the spring semester of 2002, as an Honours student under the supervision of Julian Goddard, School of Art, Curtin University I have been assigned the task of researching the work of Nicolas Bourriaud, acclaimed Director and Art critic who coined the term *relational aesthetics* in 1995 in a text for the catalogue of the exhibition *Traffic* (Freedman, 1996), CAPC contemporary museum in Bordeaux.

More specifically, we have been tasked with introducing to the reader a summary of ideas and key concepts that are currently embedded within our own art practice, juxtaposed with that of our research findings. Subsequently my reflections occur in both a retrospective first person register and that of third person account with a pronouncement of intent to further these investigations in a future post graduate context.

To begin, I must first be acknowledgment that the internet has grown undoubtedly to become one of the most important nodes in my personal portfolio as I 'author to the web' and in ways that I now socialise with others through my online creations. Perhaps in the not too distant future this socialisation of creative art practice and the everyday might become a commonplace occurrence, much like email has replaced the facsimile machine and the mobile phone becomes more pervasive.

It certainly seems possible that humans will socialise as much online as they will offline and perhaps it may even become commonplace for one to impinge upon the other most especially if predictions are correct and the Internet becomes accessible via the mobile phone. My audience is no longer locked out of the creative maker process, now literally infused with the conception of new ideas and associated behaviours as a direct result of seeing my work for the first time, as it happens, online.

 My first aesthetic considerations for this electronic domain began when I attended a demonstration of its use as part of my undergraduate studies at Edith Cowan University in 1992. By the year 1995 the internet had not only become a considered element in my in my life as a student but also as a web administrator, a creator of rudimentary online websites using nothing more than Notepad and a bunch of HTML code. It was the first time in my knowledge that Windows 95 [1] required for the first time for consumers to register their identity as a prerequisite and restriction to being able to use software on a computer.

Almost a decade later, free of the incumberance of the 2000 doomsday predicitions, the challenge I foresee will be in the permanence of that online material, not just now in 2002 but what lives through time and space to reach audiences in the future unscathed. This methodological approach, a consideration for an ongoing dialogue with the viewer from afar using the Internet, allows me to break from past practices of waiting for the audience to view artworks upon 'completion' or at worst in only the solitary confinement of an exhibition.

Networked interconnectivity, relational appreciation and embodiment only ever dreamed of till now, will surely provide for others at distance from my work an opportunity to engage and relate, beyond the parochial climes of local criticism.

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[1] Microsoft software package

Nicolas Bourriaud

An acclaimed author (Simpson, 2001) conducted an interview with critic and curator, (Bourriaud, 2002) in an attempt to glean more information regarding the descriptor coined for an art practice in the early nineties employing 'relational aesthetics'. The term 'relational aesthetics' according to Bourriaud was coined to describe the effects that a work of art has upon the viewer and the mapping of the interaction that is brought about by it's presence in an age of networked digital interfacing.

> "...I like art that allows its audience to exist in the space opened up by it. For me, art is a space of images, objects and human beings. Relational aesthetics is a way of considering the productive existence of the viewer of art, the space of participation that art can offer."

> Bourriaud, N. (2001) as cited in Artforum, April 2001

Simpson honors Bourriaud with offering in the early nineties, one of the earliest readings on artistic production emanating from and concurrently alongside information culture. The correlations between language that defines emergent technologies and the effect that these have on the Arts are also examined in an interview by Peter Schwartz of Albert Bressand[2] and Catherine Distler[3] as cited in Wired (Schwartz, 1996) where the term *'it's not info-tech anymore, it's relationship-tech'* emerged with the advent of deregulated telecommunications and global finance industries in the early 1990's.

Analysis of the effect of 'information technology' suddenly becoming 'relationship technology' in early 1990's correlating simultaneously with that of the aesthetic language paradigm is further propounded in the publication *'Thinkers and Doers on Vision of Art, Art of Vision' (Bressand & Distler, 2000)*. By delving into the recent recesses of history further evidence emerges of the underpinnings that govern the concept or idea of 'viewer participation' not just passive observation.

In his seminal publication *The Critique of Judgement*, the philosopher Immanuel Kant is best known for contribution to a broad understanding that representation makes an object possible, rather than an object making representation possible (Kant, 1914). Kant professed that the human mind was an active originator of experience, not just a passive recipient of all that is presented to it.

Bourriaud's perspectives parallel that of Kant, where the work of art is not only interactively malleable but also switching between 'on and off' according to the triggers that thought processes present the viewer with ie. upon the objects appearance or disappearance. This historical narrative must also include the philosopher and critical thinker Ayn Rand who examined audience/ artist interaction.

The term 'esthetics' or 'aesthetics' as cited by (Peikoff, 1991) and according to Rand who was born in St. Petersburg 1905, in the context of objectivist theory is the "selective re-creation of

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[2] Futurist and economist
[3] Longtime colleague of Albert Bressand and Managing Director and Co-founder of PROMETHEE

reality according to an artist's metaphysical value-judgments" explicit or not. Rand supports the notion that viewer perception dictates the art works' reception by merit of the artist attempting to 'show' a work of art, to introduce it to an audience.

Rand believed that art is an end in itself where the purpose of art is to show, not tell and is not didactic in manner , in effect a trigger or catalyst for something new to grow as a result. This understanding of where the object or "shown" work of art is presented for consideration (as opposed to the productive or sole existence of informing an audience) parallels in principle that which defines conceptual participation as presented by Bourriaud.

This idea also 'sniffs' of semiotics and all that the study of associative signifiers can offer, a logic that seeks to define viewer participation as inclusive to an art works conclusion and the foundation perhaps as to why Bourriaud jumps from Marcel Duchamp to Henry Ford thence onto Langert, Jack Lang and Stanley Brown in an attempt to illustrate the idea that industry and technology effects artists and sometimes forms the basis for new artistic expression.

Bourriaud claims to observing the artist Rirkrit Tirvanija using the principle of 'criterion of coexistence' where spaces are left for the viewer to complete or where the use of object in a work of art is the pointer, not the meaning behind it's inclusion in the field of perception. Bourriaud refers also to artists such as Christine Hill, Philippe Parreno, Pierre Joseph, Felix Gonzales-Torres as engaged with relational aesthetics.

The 'relational' adjunct in 'relational aesthetics' for me seems to be the key indicator that has caused the most excitement in an otherwise deeply rooted and conservative philosophical paradigm.

In an interview in 1998, (Kulchitsky & Bourriaud, 1998) Bourriaud uses the term 'relational' to nominate that the audience is relative and essential to the art works 'completion'. This is an important point to note as 'participation' has been cleverly reworked as the virtue for experience, not solely as a precursor of requirement in order for the artwork to exist. This notion further propounds and imbeds the meanings of an artwork to be by nature, a privileged enterprise, viewer dependent and exclusively reliant upon ability to 'participate' in the discussion. Technologists, economists and scientists also trying to entertain the notions of the elite controlling information highways disseminating only upon payment of tolls also exemplify this notion.

Simpson opens up a can of worms by questioning in footnotes attached to this interview with Bourriaud, that artists may simply be transforming themselves under the pressure of market force, adopting technologies for the merchandising of relations and consequently re-tagging cultural experience as a commodity. Perhaps the very idea of paying for access to view an artwork is as tantamount to paying to access information through 'paywalls' of the not too distant future, where the art gallery or the entire publication is online and those who pay and access the work are in fact recorded as being part of the work itself, in effect completing the artwork.

It begs the question of whether altruism will bring about open and accessible online publication of art creation and whether the publishing houses of authors and gallery stables of artists will

suffer the same fate as is happening of musicians as they find their work spread further from the income they once thought would support them.

Elisa Giaccardi, a Phd Candidate at the Centre for Advanced Inquiry in the Interactive Arts, at the University of Wales College, Newport, reinforces this shift by humans to a digitised electronic interaction or relational embodiment coining the term 'interaction design' in an article titled *Interfaced To The World: For a New Design Space*.

> "...In the future history of relational embodiment, interaction design will be of vital importance, because it will increasingly deal with the conditions of our experience and relations with things and beings."
>
> (Giaccardi, 2001)

Giaccardi positions the audience as consumers of 'user experience' mirroring the examination of relational paradigms discussed by Bourriaud. Giaccardi considers the onset of networked digital interfacing in our lives at present and ultimately creative expression as a hybrid reality, beyond that of a relational fantasy to that that of relational digital reality.

> "...Interconnectivity, modifying our relational mode of being will change the way in which we enactively produce our world and our consciousness."
>
> (Giaccardi, 2000)

Giaccardi presents interactivity of audience with artist as multi-user, globally platformed, interconnected and by virtue then central to a new form of participatory 'aesthetic'. This participation and questionable aesthetic Bourriaud would argue is limited only by the values bestowed the medium and not in it's relational potential. The issues with the Internet and associated technologies Bourriaud concludes are similar to the paranoia that surrounded the introduction of the camera.

In his book *Digital Mosaics: The Esthetics of Cyberspace* author Steven Holtzman speaks to this dawn of a new age in representation, aesthetics and onset of digital expression challenging even what Andy Warhol championed in pop art culture with the printing press. Most importantly are (Holtzman, 1997) the insights that Holtzman brings to the relationship between artist and audience, the new aesthetic as foundation for the digital and art worlds of our future.

An examination of Bourriaud's theory, rhetoric and semantic associations juxtaposed with the radical articulations of Giaccardis, are summarized succinctly in questions raised by Jean - Paul Longavesne, Director of GRIP, University, Paris XI – Ensad.

> " Art throughout twentieth century advanced towards an increasingly large place granted to the interactivity, the performance, the installation and the participation of the public. The emergence of an esthetics of Media Arts where the machine-interfaces and the networks play an increasingly significant role raises the question of the statute of the artist and the nature of his creation. It is then, with a disappearance of the support or material substrate which one

assists [the question arises] Where did Painting pass, when the machines start to paint? What becomes the 'oeuvre' of art at the era of its numerical production? How do these forms of art contribute to the emergence of a new esthetics? This communication answers the various interrogations posed by the use of the digital interfaces in technological arts, through contemporary artistic practices."

(Longavesne, 2001)

David Bromfield

David Bromfield resides in Perth, Western Australia, regularly composing critique that is often harshly critical of arts organizations, established arts related businesses and associated social identities. Bromfield provides both national and international audiences with reviews of arts related events[4] with previous writings coined for the West Australian newspaper.

Prompted by a critique in 2002 (Bromfield, 2002) of an exhibition at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, Western Australia in 2002, I pursued an interview with Bromfield granted on October 3rd, 2002 to examine, in particular the attitude that aesthetic can be defined as 'abstractions[5] poor country cousin'.

Bromfield considers most artists in Western Australia pursue art like they do *Big Brother* [6] neither as a primary goal nor as a means to metaphysical revelation and most definitely only ever as a simple pleasure. His disdain for artists who only produce to sell objects to the public was definite and unwavering throughout our discussions.

It was important to note that I was not granted an interview, rather, Bromfield preferring to "...discuss the issue over a bottle or two lest we descend into some rendition of the damned".

 Asked to elaborate on 'beauty' as a precursor for audience appreciation or 'aesthetics' to define the process of discourse emanating, Bromfield cited Adolf Hitlers' desires to create the perfect human as the most well known 'aesthete' and Andy Warhol as simply a 'dandy fraud'. Bromfield asserted forcefully that academics and arts institutions including art gallery directors and curators do more to distort societal appreciation of creative expression than to actively engage and encourage constructive critical enquiry.

With this abrupt and often carbolic attitude in mind, Bromfield likened much of what is coined as 'aesthetic' in art context as pathetic, glorifying 'processes' as opposed to genuinely engaging viewers in new experience or creative revelation.

The mere attempt to denote artistic merit or define aesthetic appeal is the bane of all artists and free thinkers according to Bromfield. The term 'aesthetically pleasing' Bromfield went onto state stems from the inadequacy by many individuals to relate to an understanding of art

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[4] http://members.iinet.net.au/~postpub/8ball/behind82.html
[5] A contemporary arts movement
[6] Popular television program in 2002

beyond that of the 'architectural artifact' i.e. framed painting. Bromfield provided reference to historical figures whose theories on aesthetics feature prominently in literature and academic discourse including Hegel, Kant, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Schroedinger.

Authors, film based media producers, artists and musicians were also cited to illustrate contemporary theories on the role of the 'aesthete' in art as idealistic, dated and often 'delusional by nature.' It is worthy of note that during the discussion Bromfield returned on a number of occasions to his appreciation of written works by J.G. Ballard, in particular a rendition of the controversial novel *Crash.*

Bromfield was keen to express the opinion that the aesthetic value bestowed works of art to be one sided and more importantly exclusively private, often expressed as 'simple verbal compromise'. Beauty on the other hand, Bromfield declared:

> "... can be the appreciation of the most perverse, extreme, isolated and dangerous elements of mankind, yet another paradox of creative expression and communication."

Beauty and aesthetics need not act hand in hand stated Bromfield, particularly considering the ongoing deconstruction of the idealist paradigms of Modernity and the cultural production of language that re-defines the pessimism of theosophy and the sciences.

The term 'aesthetics' according to David Bromfield;

> "...start's in an unknown historical setting and likewise floats around as spoken dialogue in a soup of uncertainty".

Defining the term 'aesthetics' according to Bromfield requires the understanding that to entertain the notions of application for the term 'aesthetic' involves contemplating that of the sublime. Bromfield associates the vastness, expanse and awe inspired spatial qualities of the sublime to that of works of Nietzsche, the pessimism of Hegel, the poetry of Rilke and Count Marquis de Sade.

Attempting to define aesthetic understandings as culturally transmissible or specifically learnt Bromfield believes can be fraught with difficulty and more often than not elitist, racist and undeniably sexist. Bromfield then engaged with my question regarding the effect of the internet upon the Arts in Western Australia stating:

> " …the Arts in Western Australia and in particular Perth tends to be stunted, boring and predictable…one could do very well for themselves staying away from here[7], researching the factors as to why this is one of the most provincial locations in the southern hemisphere, hardly worth the effort for any discerning Arts loving traveler."

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[7] Perth, Western Australia

Referencing Bourriaud, Giaccardi and Longavesne only seemed to rile Bromfield further, as to the consideration for technology facilitated creative expression which Bromfield likened to:

> "...mundane [video] games often lacking any creative meaning in the quest to achieve non-linearity, discontinuity, and autonomy. Aesthetics and the development of discourse to critically evaluate cyber and virtual online-networked communities likewise are fruitless and boring."

When questioned as to his appreciation for interactive art installations in public spaces and well known arts institutions Bromfield retorted:

> "...as boring as bat shit and artwork and artists coining 'relational aesthetics' as a basis for creative expression only results in conversation that dies a durgy e-tech death."

In discussion Bromfield also provided the following insights:

- Discussion that engages aesthetics as a thematic concern often decompose in grammatical distinctions, one party attempting to raise the quality or pertinence of perception over that of another;
- Aesthetics has never had a written intellectual platform, rather, occurring as everyday oral dialogue that concentrates on trying to define ' beauty' as opposed to the relatedness and pertinence of its' opposites;
- Philosophers, theorists, historians and academics create more contradictions and idealist perceptions than effectively defining how or what 'beauty' contributes to the greater community;
- The term 'relational aesthetics' Bromfield likened to academic forums of discussion that generate 'another idealist load of intellectual crap in a minefield of emerging technologies'.

Judith McGrath

Judith McGrath is a writer and arts critic in Perth, Western Australia who declares 'reviewer' as a more apt title for providing written accounts and opinions of art works or exhibitions. McGrath claimed in a number of email correspondences with me through August and September 2002 that:

> " ...I write candidly and without the need to ask for any forgiveness for my own informed critical observations minus the waffle and mindless hyperbola."

Evidence of this can be found in the many reviews McGrath has written alongside other noted contributors at the ArtSeenInWA website.[8]

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[8] Available at http://artseeninwa.com

The development of nomenclature including that of 'relational embodiment', 'relational aesthetics' and 'networked interconnectivity' is highly questionable according to McGrath. McGrath opposes terminology that makes assumptions that the viewer or audience actively 'completes' an artwork by virtue of productive existence.

McGrath, like Bromfield also has strong views on academics, curators and educators who support this terminology. McGrath scolds the readiness by artists and institutions alike to adopt this terminology of replacing professions of beauty in holistic terms with narrow, consumer and entertainment driven terms of un-consciousness.

McGrath relates coining this terminology as:

"...akin to coercive political exclusivity threatening to render the artist like one of the intelligentsia and on top of the whole arty farty bull shit pile". [9]

These views are overtly imbedded in many of McGrath's articles, preferring to make sense of the importance and relevance of;

"…what we must do is identify the Arts relevance in our lives. One explanation for art's importance is that, more than language, it sets us apart from other life forms on this planet. Only humans make art, and we have an innate want and need to express ourselves beyond language, to communicate via imagery, music and movement. "

(McGrath, 2000)

McGrath postulates that the onset of human-computer interaction is very calculated, tempting the audience into accepting vicarious virtual experience, where entertainment does little to solicit response or ignite imagination. The object and the Kantian associations with beauty attributed historically are the key to developing art that has substance and meaning attests McGrath.

"...We must enlist our mind or emotion in order to see past the surface of the physical object and perceive its metaphysical intention...there are still enough people who are in touch with their innate want and need to express themselves beyond language and others who realize that even if they don't know much about art they do know it's part of our humanity."

(McGrath 2000)[10]

McGrath believes the future for the Arts as teetering on an indeterminate, bleak and void filled with students who don't know how or why visual art can or should connect with its past, project to its future, all the while communicating in its own time.

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[9] Email excerpt to the Author - 28 September 2002
[10] Email excerpt to the Author - 30 September 2002

This lack of understanding McGrath adds will come about as:

> "... humans learn less and less, becoming poor cultural vessels unable to create and only able to relate through the homogenization of culture by generic global process, especially that facilitated by the computer and disseminated by the Internet."

Interview

Relational Aesthetics: Contradictions in Connectivity

Type: Interview face-to-face

Date: 30th September 2002

Location: Perth, Western Australia

Interviewer: Mr. Alexander Hayes

Interviewee: Ms. Judith McGrath

Hayes: Where do you position yourself when considering what evolves from academic discourse regarding artists and the markets control over what is 'it' and what is not?

McGrath: *Although I lectured in art history, I've never considered myself an academic, preferring to snorkel across the surface rather than tread the depths in a diving suit. I see a lot from my own perspective and believe I'd have limited vision in one of those helmets.*

Hayes: The term 'relational aesthetics' coined by Nicolas Bourriaud defines the "emergent metaphors of artistic production engendered by information culture in the late 90's" according to Bennett Simpson in Artforum 2001 April. What are your thoughts on this term 'relational aesthetics'?

McGrath: *I'm not surprised the art world invented yet another convoluted term so the intellectual/academic bureaucracy can usurp, define and control a 'new' art form. It's another step in a logical progression through art since it left the hand of the artist and entered the realm of the inventor.*

Hayes: Does this definition of connecting people, interactivity and the merchandising of relational experience re-define interpretations for what occurred in the 1990's or is this definition 'relational aesthetics' reminiscent of other descriptors for movements and ism's pervading decades previous to this?

McGrath: *From the caves of Lascaux to the balloon of Nadar, drawing and paintings replicate what the eye can see and are interpreted through religious, social and political constructs of the age they occur within of course. Nadar's camera replicated what the eye saw marking the*

beginning of drawing and painting demise. The 'modernists' declared replication was not as important as the Artist's (not society's constructs) interpretation of contemporary life via the traditional paint medium. This is exemplified by Matisse's response to an observer who commented on how his painting didn't look like a woman. Henri said, "That sir is not a woman, it is a painting." In Modernism the painting was more important than the subject...do keep in mind however that most early modernists knew how to draw too. When colour film (late 1930's) then television (mid 1940's in USA) intruded on the artist's realm of bringing personal interpretations and images of contemporary reality to the public, there was need for another shift. Post war Post Modernism decided the artist's thoughts and actions were more important then the image. Without a need for a definitive image, painting remains but drawing becomes redundant and beauty rests in the eye of the beholder, not the object…That old Kantian philosophy allowed the acceptance of all abstract art and denounced representative work as mere pretty pictures or 'decorative'. I personally class all abstract art, formal or expressive, 'decorative' as it is about color, like throw cushions. Drives people crazy when I say that!

Hayes: Nicolas Bourriaud, a critic and co-director of a contemporary art museum, in an interview titled "Today's Art Practise" published on the 21st September 2001 draws comparisons to galleries becoming more like cinemas and exhibitions taking form like movies without cameras. How do you consider this has to have come about?

McGrath: *To fight filmic inroads, a wider gap between Fine Art and all other art forms needed to be forged. Art theorists created elitism by stating the concept was more important than skills. The idea not the object was Art and it had to be with a capital 'A'. There were theoretical explanations for a number of 'ugly' art styles even self-mutilation, then came documentation of performance art. Now painting can be discarded. Academia validated whatever the artist did to ascertain art's credibility. Artists have become celebrities and more like actors.*

Hayes: Elisa Giaccardi in a paper titled '*Interconnectivity and Relational Embodiment in Art & Design 2000*' presents the reader with the statement that networked computing is becoming more and more pervasive in our environments with interactivity surpassing identity and singular activity. What effects do you see these ubiquitous technologies having upon the artist? What if anything will be lost with the onset of networked environments?

McGrath: *Today the artist is separated from the people, from the everyday and fine art is intended for only the initiated few. The art world is in danger of coming to a dead end, as the skills to draw and paint in pre Post Modern techniques are lost. Academics and elites realize that without those skills, they can not go back so they must go forward and join the electronic age. To save the cult of the artist and escape a vacuous contemporary art scene, they commandeered the computer. Meanwhile, to maintain the divide between artist and other practitioners, this 'new' electronic 'art' is coated in semantics and hyperbole, buoyed by academic theory and philosophical rhetoric. Bourriaud says, "What is produced are connections with the world broadcast by the object. In the era of simultaneous communication, forms only take shape in on-line time; they can be reactivated at will and are subject to change."*

Hayes: Relational Aesthetics and the concepts underpinning Relational Art were constructed as a descriptor when technology was pervading every sphere of visual reception led by mass

media and the idea of the consumer spectator. Do you define Relational Art as having evolved beyond that critical level of spectator to that of 'participator'?

McGrath: At this point I see Relational Art as an academic response to the on-line computer game. Art has gone from reacting to what the artist sees by drawing or painting it, to interacting with machines. Artists who no longer relate personally to others through their art can connect electronically to an unspecified audience in cyber space. Play Station goes to university!

Hayes: Thankyou for providing me with your feedback.

McGrath: *You are welcome!*

My Art Practice

My first conscious memories as a child were of relating to the world through building and creating. It would come as no surprise therefore that as an adult I try to employ the same intuitive skills and behaviors that are matched with critical enquiry. Words have always bumped into each other and clumsily emulated what I can define loosely in the stroke of a brush so the following chapters and pages is an exercise I rarely afford myself, one of reflection and biographical composition.

Technology, of Greek derivative techne meaning 'art, skill; cunning of hand'[11] is at the core of the creative process with every tool, each substrate and all the jigsaw pieces that go together to form an artistic creation a result of this industry. It seems we are destined to a future filled with robots who perhaps replace parts of this process but I firmly believe the impact of technology as being a continuous evolving state, not one that suddenly overtakes us. Cyborgs are merely extensions of our our mind, yet I am more and more inclined to believe that the moniker 'cunning of hand' is capable of good as much as it is evil.

Recently my interaction and collaboration with Artist and Visiting Researcher, Stellarc (Thomas, Malcolm, Catts, & Williams, 2002) as well as Victoria Vesna (Vesna, 2002) and a group of TURA sound artists including Ric Rue, Alan Lamb, Rob Muir, Kat Hope to name a few have challenged me to think beyond disciplines, beyond the maker mode, beyond the tools and instruments and to a place more invested in the interconnected and relational aspects of our creative expression.

As artists we have a powerful role to fulfill in society. We need to brave many elements and changes in fortune and likewise avoid the trappings and pitfalls that besiege the unwary traveller. The implications of technology and society are evident when accolades fall flat, when you're hungry, confused, penniless and besieged with bad dreams born of self criticism.

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[11] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology

Oh what a folly ego is to beauty and comparatively the sublime. Such mindless chatter when what we really need is quietness and presence in any given situation we find ourselves in.

Considering how to introduce my work to an audience who has no understanding of its meaning requires me to identify themes, positions or behaviors that are inherent in the development of my art practice. Listed they seem sensible and yet in practice they are nothing more than metadata for some long distant librarian fossicking through my output long after I've left this anxious place.

It seems the deeper we immerse ourselves in thinking about things and not balancing this with physically doing then we lose this capability of wonderment and simple engagement. It starts with mark making or drawing and we need to keep our "eye in"; a term used in the art world meaning that we must continue to keep engaging in a creative way in order to retain that channel of skill and knowledge, to keep and be alive.

So, I firmly believe all in all that where technology is taking the Arts is up to us artists. No amount of postulating as though technology is a separate entity to the Arts rings true for me and in the balance of things I've learned and achieved to date that our god given individual identity is both at war with technology as it is is forged by it. We need to better understand the implications that technology has on society because essentially we are in control of what it is and how it is used.

What is also evident to me is that the process of creating things is as important as the end result which invariably in my case is never finished even after I've signed or sold an artwork[12]. I just never seem to find a point at which I'm totally happy to say that something is complete as the audience register shifts and I find myself doubting and re-addressing my work.

My professional art practice to date[13] has been a 'looking glass' through which I can now interpret current and past events, a memory mirror that objectifies itself sometimes in a physical form, sometimes in a gestures, increasingly in a digital form. Let me now try and tease this out with examples and remembrance to paint that picture for you as a reader.

Things seem to repeat in my art practice, my studio musings and in the process of critical enquiry and perhaps mostly the things that most trouble me. I find myself much of the time battling with which substrate to best express a feeling or drinking far too much coffee and then rushing around madly using them all in a vain attempt to pin down something to please others. It's a terrible undoing and through it all I magic up only a few works worthy of keeping.

In essence much of my artistic expression comes from places to depart from, not simply a new thing to look at or understand. Who cares if you understand it or not as an audience? I'd rather you voice confusion or disbelief if it has grabbed you that way.

Art for me is neither definitive or absolute, nor permanent. I know that only too well as I find myself burning perfectly saleable paintings much to my art patrons horror. Perhaps this is a result of my interaction with a digital space from what has been to date a very intensive studio

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[12] Artwork in this case that is by virtue an object, transferrable, physically repeatable
[13] A decade at this point in 2002

and field based physical activity. It feels good to purge myself of the clutter but at the same time I suffer some form of loss, as if time itself stands still as I watch life burn inwards.

There is something to be said of holding a work of art, touching, smelling, caressing it as an object form if at all possible and yet there is also a blessed relief when it has passed on and made use of by others even if only in a virtual state of bits and bytes. In saying this when the creation is virtual it is the combination of senses that strain harder to connect with what is only an electronic illusion.

An introduction to my work will identify that my artistic expression often evolves from the unspeakable, not needing to be voiced yet powerfully articulated in the presence of others. Much of my time is spent actively engaged in developing a vocabulary, be it in images, symbols or text and these repeat themselves through time and space. These form the basis for discussion with others, as for me it's as much a mystery as it is to the audience who find themselves relating to symbols and signs that even I don't know where the originated from and this makes for interesting discussion much of the time.

Contrary to most of my professional colleagues and art school peers I don't 'see' myself in my art expression. A great deal of the time I'm not consciously going about being an Artist rather it is a predicament most of the time, an affliction.

I liken my art practice to that of a well oiled and established production line of visual metaphors with a working methodology that is more concerned with solidifying friendships or entertaining meaningful conversation. Perhaps this is why a review of my art practice in the last decade will illustrate more examples of inconsistency in visual form rather than a consistency of expression.

I consider every artwork that has evolved to be at the center of a key concept or malleable idea. Many works draw reference to chance, notions of probability or are extended by 'mistakes'. As soon as I try to define where an artwork starts and where it finishes, I lose my greater train of thought. My personal portfolio is filled with ambiguity as it could be presented in a myriad of ways so I've chosen to provide it in the least embellished way possible so that each and every entry can speak for itself minus the bling.

I believe there is a futility in attaching meaning to the term 'completion' or even attempting to declare a work complete. There is no completion and this will be the second time I have asserted this in this paper.

The process of considering and realizing an art work for me is a selfish process and I often enter a portal of self centeredness upon entertaining a creative possibility. It is the bane of my existence to explain to others but it's as if for small periods of time I wished that other humans cease to exist at all when I'm in the thick of the creation process. The impetus to delve deeper and relate more closely to making art that makes meaning in my life is often the result of identifying loss as opposed to discovery.

I am adept at creating works that display a sense of abandonment of an idea, often presented solely to make this statement.

My art works evolve as film, performance, sculpture, print media, paintings, drawings, audio installations, interactive online exhibitions, ceramics, textiles, writings etc. or a combination in part or with all of the above. With that said the computer as a working tool is as important as a paintbrush, which is as important as a performance and so on. I often employ more than one medium and many 'tools' in the realization of an artwork.

I consider my signed paintings to signify only that I have personally had something to do with that paintings inception. My printmaking likewise develops like many other facets of my artistic expression, occurring in many layers, none of which are more important than the other, the mirror image of what really is.

Photographs are in themselves artworks, pointers to times shared either with artists in cold studios, fruitful collaborations, events, family interaction etc. I've recently heard that it is possible to send images from a mobile telephone technology known as moblogging[14] automatically from a camera that is either worn or strapped to the body which would make for an intriguing replay of the shenanigans that artists get up to together.

Works that I have presented for commercial sale have invariably had the last rites read to them and objects that require pretty frames to sell do more to rile me than most other aesthetic nightmares. I have compromised my work many times and bear the scars of attaching too much meaning to what becomes of my work when it leaves my company.

As evidence of this process, of the breadth of where technology and the aesthetic rationale collide across mediums, I attest that the following limited selection of works and projects presented in reverse chronological order, mark significant or profound understandings for myself in their conception and transition through time to the present day.

- The 'Quicksilver' project with poet / author Daniel Oxenburgh reaffirmed for me the compromise that visualization of literary content takes when one form is presented and developed collaboratively, from artworks to a highly refined literary production;
- 'Project 44_1' in collaboration with sound engineer Rob Muir, placates the soul on a conceptual level, yet proved aesthetically elusive in 'Project 44_gen set';
- New grounds for postgraduate research have emerged from the deconstruction of cultural and gender associations in 'net_working 2002', conceptually visualised by Craig Golding in a sonic animation to be presented in a gallery context;
- Professional association and friendships were tested and new directions for print related media emerged from testing new grounds in 'Printonline 2001' where non-artists were invited to contribute via an online portal to build an exhibition of non-artworks;
- The trials and tribulations of working with youth and government funded initiatives were founded by the stagnation of 'HQ Leederville – Headquarters Public Art Project 2000 - 2002';
- The joys of actualizing against incredible odds, a sculpture garden with disabled youth realized with the 'Special Education Sculpture Project – Kalamunda Senior High School

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[14] Steve Mann, University of Toronto and Adam Greenfield - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moblogging

1998';

- The complexities of project and film direction tested and realized with 'Body of Works 2000', a compilation of seemingly unrelated circumstances evolving into a rich hybrid of cinematic experience;
- 'Paths & Plots 1999' collaboratively produced with installation artist Diokno Pasilan explored loss and grief as a thematic overture.
- 'Cyberbodies – Remote Attachments 1997' developed under the guidance of the artist Stellarc, produced in collaboration with artist Andrew Nichols, elucidating transition to a cyberbody existence (Zylinska, 2002);
- 'Fine Field Form' heralded the beginnings of using painted relief and sculptural forms to speak of experiences gained by working as an educator in the wheat belt regions of Western Australia;
- 'Treaty' emerged after working with Aboriginal artists in regional and remote communities in Western Australia;
- Commissioned by the Film and Television institute to design and construct a 13th Annual Film Award resulted in a mixed media sculptural form;
- My role as Education Officer with the Department of Family & Children Services that enabled me to involve all my working skills as an artist and educator;
- Traveling interstate to undertake an Artist-in-residence positions;
- My initiation as an artist occurred working with artists Russel Sheridan and Geoff Lummis on two large scale fire sculptures titled 'Ruby 1' and 'Ruby 2'
- Large-scale paintings, hundreds of drawings and mixed media works yet to be taken into the light of critical feedback for 'Inner Mind Fish' a body of works with poet Daniel Oxenburgh between 1995 and 2001.
- 'Portal Statement', an ambitious attempt at public sculptural works combining graphic design, printmaking and internet enabled performance;
- My first solo exhibition at Bunbury Regional Gallery containing paintings, mixed digital media, printmaking, sculpture and ceramic forms;
- 'First Fish' in conjunction with a body of small steel sculptures embodied my foray into the art scene in Bunbury, Western Australia;
- 'Bunkers Bay' and many other prints developed with artists Russell Sheridan & Linda Scrolys between 1992 and 1995.

The Future

Speculation is to indulge oneself in talk or writing of a conjectural or theoretical kind.

This seems very apt considering I have enrolled in a Doctorate of Creative Arts at Curtin University. My research intent is to examine cultural meanings or artistic endeavour emanating from vernacular practices in the Australian context, to better understand how more generally the vernacular improvisations of object inform creative artistic enquiry and to tap the potential that this area of interest as a creatively legitimate research focus (Mahoney, n.d.).

The specificit of this research is outlined in my draft thesis intention for a Doctorate of Creative Arts conducted with supervision from Dr. Ted Snell School of Art and Dr. Graham Seal, (Seal, 2002) School of Australian Studies, Curtin University.

The research focus is essentially conducting activities that investigate cultural 'meanings' that develop through the creative adaptation of industrial form, specifically that of the 44 gallon drum eg, as a vehicle for Australian acoustic folklore (Bandt, 2001)

The title of the study 'The 44 Gallon Drum: Interrogation Of An Australian Myth' defines loosely the key elements of enquiry and serves to inform the statement of my research intent.

The key research question I am seeking to answer is *'How can the creative exploration of the 44-gallon drum further develop Australian cultural knowledge?'*

Research objectives and investigative activity include:

- creative vernacular use of the 44 gallon drum in urban, rural and remote locations;
- gender specific associations attributed this vessel in Australian culture;
- meanings attributed this vessel in film, television and literature;
- sustainable use and reuse of the 44 gallon drum

These objectives will be achieved by sustaining research methodology that fosters;

- action based research;
- qualitative data collection;
- creative personal expression using 'resonance' as a thematic framework

The primary significance of this research is to develop further understandings of Australian culture and the scope of this research to extend current knowledge of the critical role that creative vernacular improvisation defines for Australian culture.

I have established connections with leading industrial manufacturing and retail distributors such as Wesfuel Western Australia and Visypak Industries and ongoing support has been pledged for the duration of this research project by these corporate organizations. This support has enabled the recent construction and realization of several sonic installations utilizing the inherent resonant qualities of the 44-gallon drum (Mahoney).

Advice also points to the continuation of exhibiting my art works in a commercial setting, engaging with projects that extend the scope of my art practice in an international context and the development of a professional arts / educator profile that empowers and informs my research potential. To survive as an artist, I have discovered, is to be humble, forthright and regularly engage others in dialogue looking to make a difference.

What the future holds for my art practice will most definitely subject to the affordance of access to an audience via the world wide web. I welcome your contributions as part of the 'completion' of my art works and creative practice.

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